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A GARDEN *of* YESTERDAY

By

EDITH LIVINGSTON SMITH

1. American Literature - Misc.

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Smith





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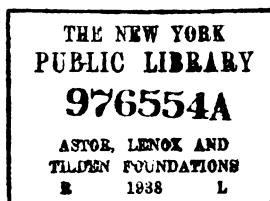


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A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

The author wishes to acknowledge the courtesy of the proprietors of *Good Housekeeping* and *House and Garden* in whose columns respectively appeared the verses and the story which follow.

*The cookies that my grandma baked
were under lock and key,
But just a little word of "please"
was open sesame,
And grandma's smile was sunshine
to a little girl like me.*

*My grandma had a garden with a
picket fence around
Where grew the sweetest flowers
that a honey bee e'er found,
And a brook that got our feet wet,
'way at the farthest bound.*

*The trees in front of Grandma's
house had roots that stayed
right out*

*To make us homes for paper dolls,
while birds sang high about,
And fairies danced at night-time
there, I'm sure without a
doubt.*

*If I could have one single wish come
true and always stay,
I'd wish to be just little and that
we could move away,
And live in Grandma's house with
her for ever and a day.*

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

When a story-book Grandmother planted Sympathy in the heart of a little girl she did not know it would grow two flowers:— Remembrance and Understanding.



WHEN Now walks down the lane of Long Ago and sees there a little girl who is a woman to-day, there steals over the memory a sense of unreality of the changes and chances of time which weigh events in the scale of importance. It is as easy for recollection to say

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

"it is" as for actuality to say "it was"; one has but to turn the bend in the road of twisted years and there is the flower from which the faded fragrance steals, there is the music from which the silence trembles, there is the child-happiness of unresponsibility in which the idleness of old age finds its image—and its dream of peace.

When Now walks down the lane of Long Ago a woman's hands reach out eagerly to clutch the childish fingers which were hers, her heart encompasses the doubts and fears of a wistful, wondering opening consciousness—a woman's understanding bridges the years.

If you go with me, you must shut
the lower half of the double door

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

of the big white house—Grandmother's house—for she calls, "Shut the door, childie, and don't forget the garden gate," so we must do what she asks.

"Yes, Grandmother," you must answer; not just "Yes'm," as you may to the school-teacher.

It is only a step to the garden gate. The latch lifts easily. Whitewashed picket fences are nicer than painted ones, aren't they?

Why?

Because Grandmother's fence is whitewashed and the house too, shingle on shingle; she won't have it painted.

Now turn and wave your hand to Grandmother, for she is looking to see if you really shut the gate—

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

that's so the chickens won't get in.

"Keep in the shade, child," she calls.

(Yes, there were shadows in Grandmother's garden; how strange!)

You must take a long breath, because the minute you shut the gate and think where you are, you can smell it all at once—the box that edges the paths, the phlox and the hollyhocks, the larkspur and four o'clocks, the bachelor buttons and ten weeks' stock; the sweet peas and candytuft, and mignonette and sweet geranium (it needs a very long breath); the lavender and heliotrope, and poppies and forget-me-nots; the pansies and nasturtiums and sunflowers, and all the other blossoms—wealth of green

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

and color; mixed with the drowsy hum of insects—borne on the clear note of a bird, shut in by the over-flowing sense of sunlight and tree-tops, and the under tenderness of Summer's growth.

You mustn't go down the middle path first for that one comes last. No, don't go to your wrong hand side. When I was much littler than I am now I learned my right hand from my wrong one by the paths in the garden. On the wrong side are all the things to eat—peas and beans and corn and such things that are nice—for dinner, but not when one just comes on a visit to the garden.

Over here? Yes, there are some things to eat, but in with the flowers, currant bushes and pear trees that

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

have to be propped up with long sticks because they are going to have so many pears; and peach trees and plum trees—just a few—and the flowers that like to be shady grow underneath them.

Hear how the bumble bees bumble around the ever blooming roses and the lilies. Did you ever see lilies so much taller than little girls? They can look right over the fence. Great big red ones and white ones, that smell 'most as sweet as roses, and the tiger ones with freckles like mine.

If you were a fairy would you rather dance here or under the poppy umbrellas?

You would?

Well no, I wouldn't because they don't really. I beg your pardon, but

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

if you want to see the place where they meet in the moonlight (there are other places too—out under the big trees by the front gate, where the roots of the trees grow right out of the ground to make houses for paper dolls is one, and down in the glen)—but if you want to see their most favorite place, it is down the middle garden path. Yes, let us go.

Here, you see the box stops edging the paths and the bushes do it instead. Those are peony bushes and bleeding heart—the peonies are all gone now like most of the roses and the lilies of the valley by the fence—and here is a trellis that makes a bridge over the path for the grapes to grow over. You can sit here on the benches under the

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

trellis if you want to. I often do when the grapes are ripe.

“You never saw so many old-fashioned flowers?” Do you like new-fashioned ones best? What kind are they?—You don’t?—Oh, I am glad, for Grandmother and Mother and I all like this kind and there is such a lot of them. Now, the big path stops this side of the trellis and it gets little with just trees and grass on each side of it. Your skirts are long. I am so sorry—it takes the dew such a long time to dry. Mine don’t touch the grass, you see.

Now *this* is where the fairies come. See the cobwebs on the grass? That’s what people call them, but they are really the table covers of the fairies when they have

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

had supper out here in the garden at night. The trees grow closer and closer here. When little girls are alone they always run down this bit of the path.

“Why?”

I don't know exactly, but—I think I'll take your hand, please—to show you the way.

Now, go slow again. The sun sifts through the trees just like the flour does through the sifter when Grandmother makes sponge cake. See how long and soft the grass is here, and the path stops being a path and is just an open space—now it's a path again and where it turns—guess?

“You cannot?”

A big tree and a seat made of twisted wood. Isn't that the loveli-

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

est place to play house? Here is where Grandmother and Grandfather used to sit. Grandmother told me so.

Hark! Do you hear singing? It's the brook right down at the bottom of this little hill. Grandmother said that the brook sang all their words to music as if it was a song when she and Grandfather were lovers.

Do you know what a lover is? It's Grandfathers and Grandmothers before there is any you.

But lovers don't fade like the roses, Grandmother says. They keep on gathering all the sweetness of love into all the years just like the bees do honey—oh! I can't explain. You ask Grandmother—little girls never can explain, but

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

they *know* because they feel it all inside.

“Some day, dear child, you will understand these things and life,” Grandmother says. “Oh, Grandmother, I know,” I say. “That is I know the outside of it all. It is just like the breath of the garden, that is, all of it; even if little girls don’t know the name of each flower, they can understand the sweetness is all of them. Isn’t that like life?”

“Yes, philosopher,” Grandmother says. “It is like a garden with the roses and the thorns, the sun and the shadows, the spring-time and the dead, dead leaves, the lilacs and the bittersweet; but a child knows not of thorns and shadows, and bittersweet climbs too high over your head.”

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

Grandmother likes riddles. Most generally, I can't guess them.

When we go back I'll pick you some flowers and we'll get some blackberries to eat. I know how to make a basket out of grape leaves and little sticks, and trumpet creeper trumps hold quite a lot if you put the little berries in them. Here—HERE—we are! Don't you love it? *Don't you?* You must say you do. Isn't that the dearest, runaway brook? Doesn't it sound cool when it splashes over the rocks? And you can learn all about geography—I mean islands and isthmuses and peninsulas—when you go in paddling.

What a pity! I forgot your skirts were so long. Would you get them wet? Perhaps you would.

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

Oh, thank you. Are you sure it is polite—you really wouldn't mind if I went in paddling alone? Yes, I always do——

Is it as late as that? We must go back. I wish we had brought some cookies. Perhaps we can find some early pears. You can never guess why, when I'm in Grandmother's dining-room I think of the garden 'most always.

"Flowers on the table?" Yes, but not that—sometimes it's currants, sometimes it's pears stewed in molasses—or early it's strawberries and now it's blackberries—and sometimes I have to come out and get three peach leaves to put in the milk that Grandmother is heating for custard.

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

Then on Sundays I think of the garden. Sundays is when Grandfather who is dead, has his blossoms. We come out here and find the very best flowers we can find and we take them in the house where Grandmother fills the tin crosses half full of moss and water, and then we put the flowers in those until they look like rainbow crosses. Then we go to church—early. Partly because Harry Clay—that's the white horse—goes slowly (he's old like Grandmother), but the second "because" is that we have to go to the burying-ground first. That's where people get planted before they grow to Heaven.

We stop on the road and put the reins through a hole in the post—but Harry Clay would stand all

A·GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

right if we didn't—he likes standing best.

Our little dead yard is near to the road with an evergreen hedge about it. Grandmother squeezes in through a hole in the hedge and I squeeze in easier after her. Then she puts crosses on the graves. There are others besides Grandfather's but she kneels down by his and so do I too, and I say "Our Father" and "Now I lay me down to sleep" to myself, but I get through before Grandmother does. When she is ready we go back to the wagon and drive a little way further to church. Grandmother ties Harry Clay again, under a shed this time, and while the bell rings just a little, we walk up a path and go in to church.

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

I always wear a very stiff white dress and a white hat and I have on a Roman sash. That is a sash that is of many colors like Joseph's coat in the Bible was. I don't think it's pretty. Other little girls have them all pink or blue or all red. Every Sunday I say to Grandmother: "Grandmother, must I wear my Roman sash?" and every Sunday I wear it.

Church is long. I like the music—the birds and the locusts sing outside—the fans flutter—I get a little sleepy and I'm afraid I'll drop my five cents. Yes, I do love God and I try to be good—I wish my Roman sash was all pink!

The church gets over and we go out. Grandmother talks to ladies and then we go home.

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

Now we'll get the big bunch of flowers.

You hold them please, while I get the berries. Oh! here are some plums on the ground. Grandmother doesn't mind if we shake the tree a little.

Now we must shut the gate again. Down that little path is where the cows come up from the road at night. The cows made that path, but I think the fairies helped.

Won't you come into the house? Up there is where I sleep at night, and I can hear the crickets cricketing out here. Those green shutters belong to the parlor. The parlor has a carpet with big rings on it that you can play marbles in on rainy days. I help Grandmother dust the parlor in the mornings.

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

There is a weather thing with a little man and woman and the lady goes in the house when it rains and the man comes out, for it's politer for *him* to get wet, and there are so many other things I would like to show you. I'm sorry you can't come.

On one table there is a picture of Grandfather. Grandmother always dusts that table. She puts fresh flowers there too, every morning in a little vase. Then she picks up the picture and kisses Grandfather and I don't talk to her. If she stays by the table too long I put my hand in hers just to remind her she hasn't dusted the secretary yet, and then she kisses *me*.

Oh, Reader—look in my eyes—
do you understand?

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

I am not a little girl! It has all gone—the old garden, the days of play and nights of dreaming through insect song, and Grandmother has no longer need of Grandfather's picture.

Look quickly down the lane of Long Ago if you would see a little girl running hard toward a white house with dormer windows. That is when she would leave her own home to come on one of those visits. The stage lets her down at the big gate. Then she runs past the little whispering grove, past the two horsechestnut trees that hold the hammock, past the circle where the trumpet creeper climbs high.

The little girl is almost out of breath. The door of the house opens. An old lady comes out and stands on the porch. The curls

A GARDEN OF YESTERDAY

each side of her face are twilight gray and the little girl's curls are yellow in the morning of life. There is a rush into open arms—"Oh! Grandmother—I've come!"

Shut the double door very gently. Lead other little girls' feet of your guiding into the garden of a Now, that perchance, some time in the years to come they may lean out of the window of remembrance and say "Make me a child again."

When the fragrance of the Past steals back as from a faded rose it is sweet, indeed, but if not——

Whose the reproach? Whose the garden spot, unplanted.



